

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MOTIVATION IN MENTORING STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Through this article, the significance of motivation, whether extrinsic or intrinsic in the teaching and learning process is focused. Various simple methods to enhance motivation among students are highlighted in an effort towards quality teaching and inculcating a love for learning.

The abstract word 'motivation' is rather difficult to define. It is easier and more useful to think in terms of the 'motivated' student: one who is willing and eager to invest effort in learning activities and to progress. Student motivation makes teaching and learning immeasurably easier, more enjoyable as well as more productive; hence the importance of the topic for teachers. Various studies have found that motivation is very strongly related to achievement in language learning (e.g. Gardener and Lambert, 1972. Gardener, 1980) The authors of a classic study of successful language learning (Naiman et al., 1978) drew the conclusion that the most successful learners are those who display certain typical characteristics, most of them clearly associated with motivation. Some of the characteristics of motivated students are:

1. Positive task orientation

The student is willing to tackle tasks and challenges, and has confidence in his or her success.

2. Goal orientation

The student is very aware of the goals of learning, or of specific learning activities and directs his or her efforts towards achieving them.

3. Perseverance

The student consistently invests a high level of effort in learning and is not discouraged by setbacks or apparent lack of progress.

To motivate students a useful distinction for teachers is that between 'intrinsic motivation' (the urge to engage in the learning activity for its own sake) and 'extrinsic motivation' (that is derived from external incentives). Both of these play an important part in class-room motivation and both are accessible to teacher influence. In an article written some years ago Girard (1977) emphasized that it is an important part of the teacher's job to motivate students. In more recent 'student centered' approaches to language teaching most teachers would agree that it is largely their responsibility to motivate students and that they invest quite a lot of effort in doing so.

Extrinsic motivation is rather more accessible to teacher influence as it is dependent on incentives, encouragement or even admonishment to the students. Such outside influences might include the student's need to prove his or her worth to a teacher or parents, the pressure of examination success or simply the desire to impress other students in the class. The teacher may be able to use these influences to motivate the students to do well. Here are some of them:

- Success and its rewards

This is perhaps the single most important feature in raising extrinsic motivation. Students who have achieved success in past tasks will definitely be more willing to engage in the next one; will be more confident in their chances of success and more enthusiastic to persevere in their efforts. It is important to note that 'success' in this context refers to

success and more enthusiastic to persevere in their efforts. It is important to note that 'success' in this context refers to 'doing a task correctly', 'getting the answers right'. The teacher has two important functions here: to let students understand clearly what they have to learn to get an 'A' and to make them aware of their success. The message can be conveyed by a nod, a tick or even a smile. But a sense of pride and satisfaction will definitely be enhanced by explicit praise or by its expression in quantitative grades especially in unconfident students. The prize distribution ceremony in schools wherein the entire gamut of students, teachers and parents gather together most certainly proves a great incentive for motivating students. In more recent times, the announcement of toppers in each class in the annual school magazine and the school website is also a positive move in this direction.

- Failure and its penalties

Failure is not merely a matter of wrong answers; students should be aware that they fail if they have performed relatively less than they could have, if they are making unsatisfactory progress or simply not taking care. However, occasional failures are part of any learning process. Students should be made to understand this and encouraged to take their failures as stepping stones to success and a reason for further perseverance. As with success, it is part of the teacher's job to make students aware of when they are failing. However, too much emphasis on shortcomings could lower students' motivation and demoralize them. So, the teacher needs to be discreet and judicious in her comments. Some possible suggestions are: students can maintain a record in their school dairies of their performance in the weekly class test and have them signed by their parents. Such a practice can help both students and parents to keep a track of their performances. In addition, the teacher must discuss the answers and focus on the shortcomings. In

case of a general mistake, it is a signal to the teacher that the topic needs to be revised. Some schools have successfully begun extra coaching for students below average after the school hours. Also, an hour is allocated to each subject teacher, after school, when the students can access him or her online and clarify their doubts and thus improve on their performances.

- Tests

The motivating power of tests, whether the weekly class tests or the terminal examinations, is apparent. When students know that they are going to be tested on specific material every week, they will normally be more motivated to study it carefully than if they are simply told to learn it. Some schools specify the examination schedule in the school dairy. This informs both students and parents, right at the beginning of the session, about the dates for each terminal exam. Teachers also provide pamphlets regarding the syllabus for each term. In addition to these terminal examinations students give the weekly tests, i.e. every Monday. The subject assigned for each Monday test is clearly indicated in the test schedule chart in the school dairy for the entire academic year. Every week, the teacher tells the portion for the particular test. Such regular tests prove a useful incentive for improving performance as it paves the way for intensive study and thorough knowledge.

- Competition

Students are often motivated to give off their best not so much for the sake of learning but in order to beat their opponents in a competition. However, individual competitions can prove stressful for students who have a low self image or little confidence; if over-used, it can affect negatively the students' willingness to co-operate. Instead, group contests tend to get better results than individual ones; they are more enjoyable, less tense and equally motivating. Inter-house competitions within

or inter-school competitions prove highly motivating. Students police each other only to beat their opponents. The benefit of videotaping of such competitions and screening inter-school competitions on T.V for increasing the morale of students is common knowledge. However, it is important to note here that the teacher mustn't rely on any one of these methods too consistently or use it too often, since overuse of any one of them can lead to negative attitudes and harmful long term learning.

Unlike extrinsic motivation, ***intrinsic motivation*** is largely rooted in the attitude of the students: whether they see the learning as worthwhile, whether they like the subject, however the teacher can certainly foster these attitudes by giving further interesting and attractive information about the subject matter. The teacher can avail different means of arousing interest in tasks. Some of them are:

- Clear goals

Students should be aware of the objectives of the task both language learning and content. For example, a guessing game may prove useful in the language learning goal of practising questions and the content goal of guessing answers.

- Visuals

Students should have something to look at that is eye-catching and relevant to the task. Most course books these days are colourful and eye-catching with plenty of good quality visual material. Students may be encouraged to make projects on topics taught and to display, colorfully, topics from their syllabus on the Bee boards. Teachers may occasionally present material on Power Point to bring a difference to their lessons.

- Activities

Making the activities fun; a sense of entertainment about the proceedings will always help to keep motivation high. Students are particularly interested in the teacher's

sample, *have got / has got* can be presented by talking about families, anecdotes, stories and jokes which will be excellent methods of introducing a new lesson without the students even noticing it. Students' interest and motivation will certainly not be stirred to the same extent if we choose to present just a bare grammatical structure or a list of words, since they tend to be abstract items without a close connection to the real world of language use. So, one objective of a teacher should be to incorporate a particular grammatical item into an interesting topic. For example, *have got / has got* can be presented by talking about families.

- Personalisation

Any task requiring the student's personal response will naturally heighten motivation and interest. Personalisation helps to focus the student's attention at the beginning of a lesson, makes an impact on the student that will last, this will often lead to better retention of the language input and therefore more successful learning. Hence, the teacher must choose tasks that have to do with the students themselves, their opinions, experiences and suggestions. Personalisation is achieved mainly in two ways. Firstly, by showing personal interest in the students, both inside and outside the class, by finding about their opinions, their attitudes, and their day to day life. Knowing what interests them and what offends them can help determine topic areas for the class. Another way of personalisation is by personalising materials and activities. Wherever possible, the teacher should elicit real experiences and opinions from their students rather than rely on fictional situations and characters to illustrate and practice language. Meaningful language is always more easily retained by learners. One reason for the popularity of the Communicative Approach is that it tries to personalise and localise language and adapt it to the interests and needs of students. Topical items with which

students are familiar are used during these lessons. This motivates the students, arouses their interest, and leads to more active participation.

We all have memories of the good teachers and of course the less competent teachers. In a recent consensus among my colleagues on teachers, most agreed that some of their best teachers were those who in some way 'encouraged' them to want to give off their best. Most believed that motivating behavior on the part of the teacher implies increasing enjoyment in the learning process. Most agreed that in the primary section their best teachers motivated them by gentler and warmer personal support, 'I felt she/he cared about me and enjoyed teaching me so I enjoyed learning with her/him and wanted to do my best'. While at the secondary level, the best teachers demanded consistently high standards, gave frequent tests, punishing slackness and so on. These teachers succeeded in conveying to their students a faith in their ability to reach the standard. A typical comment was something like, 'I would never have believed I could do it my teacher showed me I could and pushed me until I got there.' And there is a third category of teachers who motivate students by making the tasks and lessons interesting. Interest is aroused by careful planning of

stimulating topics and tasks and by the teacher's own enthusiasm and eagerness. They seem teachers who are excited by their subject or who simply enjoy teaching and seem to communicate their own motivation to their students.

In short, a teacher may select activities that have their origin in different teaching approaches, take an eclectic approach to teaching but it is of paramount importance that the topics, tasks and methodologies motivate students and inculcate in them a love for learning.

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